

CHAPTER V

*BELIGION**(continued)*

FRIARS. CLERGY IN LOWER, ORDERS. MONKS.
 CHURCH AS A WHOLE. WYCLIFFE AND HIS
 NEW RELIGION

FOR the spread of religious instruction and the creation of religious enthusiasm, the four orders of friars were at this time the most active part of the Catholic Church. It was now a century and a half since the new foundations of St. Francis and St. Dominic had created the greatest revival that ever stirred the mediaeval world." The first ardour of those great days had long since cooled. Wealth and power had produced in the mendicant orders some of their usual consequences. In true spiritual zeal, in purity of ideal, there had been a great falling off among the friars ; but there had been less decline in their activity, and in influence they were perhaps as strong as ever. Compared to the other parts of the Church, the mendicants still held their own in the competition for the patronage of the laity, though their motives in competing were less pure, and the means they employed more open to criticism than of old. The furious and bitter attacks directed against them by satirists and poets, Lollards and Bishops alike, all breathe fear and hatred, not contempt. Langland, Chaucer, Wycliffe, FitzEalph, were all for different reasons jealous of the influence exercised by the friars over their fellow-countrymen. Langland saw them corrupt the Catholic religion ; Chaucer saw them play on the folly and weakness of human nature ; Wycliffe saw them resist reformation with the ardour and success which the Jesuits afterwards displayed in the same cause ; FitzEalph saw his episcopal authority defied,